**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS**

PARENT COMMUNICATION

SEGMENT #4: TEACHER TO PARENT COMMUNICATION

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The Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute

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Richmond, Virginia

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A project administered by

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Funding and technical assistance by the
Virginia Department of Education

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Professional Development Toolkit for
New and Beginning Teachers

The PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS is a research-based video streamed program with accompanying resource documents. The program is an outgrowth of a previous Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) online mentoring study at Virginia Commonwealth University. The findings of the online mentoring study revealed twelve topics new and beginning teachers felt additional university training would have led them to more effective use of best practices in the classroom. In this program, each of the twelve topics is presented in two to six stand alone video segments. The total number of segments is forty five. Suggested uses, in addition to personal viewing by K-12 teachers for self improvement, include professional development, mentor and mentee, university prospective teacher, and small or large group training.

The facilitators are university faculty and practitioners with field experience. Each is currently involved in teacher training or serves as a staff development administrator. All are currently engaged in educational research, teaching and/or educational policy development.

The teachers in the video programs are classroom teachers. Some of them were participants in the 2006 Online Mentoring Study in which the topics for this project were identified. They represent all disciplines in K-12 grades.

Resource documents for the programs are provided as PDF files to facilitate the use of the 45 video segments. The first set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) an introduction to program facilitators, including a definition of each topic, and a list of the video segments, and (3) a research formative study summary that helped to guide the project's development. The second set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) a full text transcript for each video segment, (3) a set of problems and solutions related to each video segment in the form of a work-study guide, and (4) an annotated bibliographic summary of references and Internet links for each transcript. Many of the organizations and agencies referenced in the transcripts are actively involved in the development of video and professional development presentations that support policy and advocacy.

Every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information. Internet content, however, does appear, disappear and change over time. CEPI, as a university-based educational policy research institute endorses no specific position of any listed group.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

SEGMENT #4: TEACHER TO PARENT COMMUNICATION

🗀 VIDEO SEGMENT TRANSCRIPT

Parent Communication: Communication strategies that can be used with parents to promote home and community support for student learning.

Facilitator: Dr. Bill Bosher, Jr. Distinguished Professor
Educational and Government Leadership and School Improvement
Virginia Commonwealth University

AUDIO	VIDEO
You may be aware of situations or remember telephone calls, letters and printed materials you were given by the school to take to your parents when you were a young student. Did the notices and letters always get to your parents on time? Those were the standard ways schools communicated with parents in the past. Delivery was often unsuccessful because parents were not reached. Because of the "distance" between home and school, messages were lost in book bags, backpacks, at the bus stop, along streets and highways, and stashed among other papers. Parent could not be reached because they were not available when called, had no telephone, or experienced technical problems.	DR. BOSHER
I am Bill Bosher, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute and Distinguished Professor of Public Policy and Education. Has communication with parents improved today? What new and different ways do we now have to communicate with parents?	
Use of the telephone, letters, and printed announcements are often referred to as traditional ways of communicating with parents. Newer communication tools include electronic systems and technology that are purchased to ensure that information is accessible. They are also known to speed the rate of information transfer.	
Sean Moshir, founder and CEO of mobile technology, the provider of CellTrust is credited in THE JOURNAL "Power of Printing" as having said "knowing when an assignment is due, when a special event is taking place, or even understanding a child's difficulty in school brings the parent closer to the child." Moshir's comment was made in reference to the value of a computer-based parent notification system designed to inform parents of emergencies, student assignments, attendance, and school events.	
There are electronic systems on the market that may bring the parent closer to the child but not all parents, like schools, have them available for communication. However, technological advances in use of the Internet, computers, and telephones are contributing in a positive way to accessibility and to making immediate contacts with parents less problematic. More sophisticated systems in some states and schools provide select	

information to select parents.

     1. A system called Teleparent, for example, includes a functionality to overcome language barriers.

     2. A system in Nevada called "Parent Network" provides access to a variety of useful grade –specific educational activities about student performance or state assessments.

     3. Florida's Virtual School has a track that let's parents see how the child is performing, take a look at work submitted and see how frequently deadlines are met.

     4. SurfStation uses the Internet, e-mail and a web-based student information system to communicate with parents.

     5. In Virginia, school systems have developed networks to use e-mail, the Internet, and web-based systems to communicate with parents in a variety of ways. One example is found in Henrico County where approximately 24,000 laptops were released to students in grades 6-12. Students have a direct pathway to rich, diverse and current information. Students and teachers have access to content-rich lesson plans that were developed by Henrico teachers and specialists, panels of parents, curriculum experts and to Internet sources that contain reviews of lesson plans.

A large percent of the homes in Virginia have at least one computer. The total number of cell phone users in the U.S. grew 14% per year to 207.9 million by the end of 2006, a figure representing 69% of the U.S. population.

Let's see what teachers think about the technology available to them to assist with communication with parents.

My name is Sharon Brown. I am a middle school teacher. I have taught for 1 year. I feel fortunate to work in a school district that places high value on the use of technology as a teaching, learning and reporting tool. I have seen our access and use of technology increase in use school-wide in two years. For example, technology provides an excellent opportunity for me to help parents to be proactive as well as be informed of their child's academic success. Parents can now look at their child's grades by class and by assignment. As a teacher, I feel the use of technology goes far in closing the communication gap that often exists between the school and home.	SHARON BROWN
My name is Andrew Givens and this is my fifth year of teaching. For the last four years, I have taught at Wilder Middle School. Two technology tools used in my school division are becoming an integral part of school to home communication. First, my school division has a program for parents to access their child's grades online. This online tool allows a parent to see their child's performance throughout the year. It can really lessen the surprise when they receive a bad grade. The second technology tool provided by my school division is email. I often try to get as many email addresses as possible at the start of the year. I really encourage email contact because it is much easier to reach homes via computer than through a phone call. Also, I	ANDREW GIVENS

send out mass emails before tests or projects are due to inform parents and to recommend ways they can help their child. Continue to look at new technologies and methods for communicating with parents. The end result is an effective relationship between the home and school.	DR. BOSHER

📁 PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Ask yourself: How are you currently partnering with families and the community to improve learning in your classroom? What is going well? What would you like to change or improve in the future? What are you worrying about?

Suggested use for this module:

1. Analyze:

Please select one of the scenarios below and problem-solve a list of possible solutions. Record your ideas in the space provided. Discuss these ideas with your other educators (mentor, colleagues, or other beginning teachers).

2. View:

Watch the corresponding video on this topic. How does this information change your ideas?

3. Compare:

Revisit the scenario selected. Next, review the section entitled, "Possible Solutions" comparing the ideas listed with your own list.

4. Reflect:

How will you apply this new information to your current or future classroom? What goal will you set to help you begin to change your practices? What support is needed to help you accomplish this goal?

5. Apply:

List the first step towards change below. Create a timeline for success and place deadlines in your personal planner as a reminder. How will you know when you have met your goals?

Scenarios 1 & 2: Parent Communication

Scenario 1

A parent calls and emails constantly asking for information about upcoming events and probing for information about situations taking place in the classroom setting. Just yesterday, you replied to a request for field trip dates for the year and costs for the theatre assembly occurring next week. Another phone message arrives today while you are teaching science related to school supplies. How should you respond to this parent?

Scenario 2

As a beginning teacher, you recognize the need to partner with families to improve learning. You are attending evening activities and almost no parents are attending. Also, you have five parents who have not scheduled mandatory meetings for this year and are not responding to your note home. How can you meet the needs of all the families of your students?

Circle the scenario that you selected below:

Scenario 1   Scenario 2

Record a list of your own possible solutions here:

Summary & Goal Setting:

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Building Parental Involvement

Communication

- Always begin with the positive. Good news phone calls or postcards sent early in the year develop a positive relationship and provide families with timely and specific comments about their child.

- Newsletters, letters of notification, and materials should use language and vocabulary which are easily understood by all parents.

- As you design newsletters, consider the following tips:

    ✓ Don't overwhelm. Families are likely to read something short and informational rather than a lengthy document. Try sending communications home every few weeks instead of a longer version four to five times a year.

    ✓ Work collaboratively. Creating a joint newsletter with others on your grade level will divvy up the work load and increase the quality of your communications.

    ✓ Spotlight student work. Consider including a one-page section which highlights cooperative learning projects or individual work. Rotate the students who are being showcased.

    ✓ Create a standard newsletter format. Recurring columns or features makes your writing tasks much easier. Suggestions include: Calendar/ Upcoming Activities, Parenting Tips/Resources, 'Frequently-asked Questions' section, Instructional technique or weekly activity, Quotes or visuals, 'Don't Forget' section highlighting key event details, Special thanks, websites, and/or Volunteer Opportunities.

- Always hold conversations in appropriate locations (classroom rather than hallways).

- Send home a form at the start of the year which asks parents if they are willing to volunteer and in what capacity. Have a space for volunteers to work in and provide volunteers with meaningful tasks to complete (such as listening to children read or publishing writing.

Scheduling

- Days, times, and location of events are flexible to ensure that all parents can attend some of your events. Many parents may travel or work during the evenings, so occasional early morning and/or weekend activities invite all families to participate in school activities.

Parent Conferences

- Give parents plenty of notice when scheduling conferences. Smile and greet them at the classroom door. Thank the parent for taking the time to come and work together with the school.

- Begin conferences in a relaxed manner (consider coffee or refreshments) and be professional and understanding throughout the conversation. Start with something that is going well and then ask the parent to tell you more about their child. Often, parents will initiate or broach a difficult subject first making the conversation much easier to conduct. Consider sitting face-to-face next to one another rather than conducting the conference or meetings across a desk.

- If you are holding multiple conferences on a particular day, establish a waiting area outside the classroom with a couple of chairs and a conference schedule. This will prevent disruptions by parents who arrive early or at the wrong appointment time. Place photos of classroom projects, newsletters,

or a classroom-created book on the chairs to provide parents with something to browse while they wait.

- Make sure everything is graded and all assessments are up-to-date prior to scheduling your conferences. Demonstrate suggestions or concerns by 'showing' rather than 'telling'. For example, if you are concerned that a student is rushing through assignments, display a sample paper which serves as an example of this concern. Always have a copy of previous report cards to refer back to as needed during the conference.

- Let your parents know that you are willing to stop and answer questions at any point along the way. Listen and find positive points throughout the conversation.

- Create a file folder with copies of sheets addressing typical concerns (reading strategies, homework help, curriculum overviews, school calendars) at your conference table. During the conference, it will then easy to pull out and distribute these forms as needed.

- Be respectful and end on time. Families may have childcare or other meetings. Sticking to your schedule will benefit everyone.

- End the conference by reviewing one or two key points for improvement as well as a student strength. Some schools use a parent meeting form to document progress and suggestions during conferences. If you are summarizing the content of your meeting on a form, have the parent sign it and provide a copy right away for them to take home. This allows the parent to leave with the critical information in hand and eliminates the need to remember to copy and send the form home at a later date.

📁 ANNOTATED RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

❖ Parents of culturally diverse students can be an untapped resource in today's classrooms. Care should be taken to keep parents informed through communication.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah J. (2005). *What successful mentors do.* CA:Corwin Press, p. 177.

❖ Allow students to work in small groups to preview their homework assignments to ensure that all understand the assignment. This also helps parents who may not be able to read the assignment in English.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do.* CA:Corwin Press, p. 177.

❖ As a "new teacher on the block," try to talk to others familiar with the student before making calls or planning conferences with parents.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do.* CA:Corwin Press, p. 183.

❖ Being organized and prepared in advance of the parent-teacher conference with potential solutions to the problems a teacher expects to hear can reap rewards with increased communication and rapport with parents.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah J. (2005). *What successful mentors do.* CA:Corwin Press, p. 183.

❖ Teachers say parents may not make the first move but generally will respond when asked to help at home or play role in the classroom. Some teachers involve parents in academic activities such as reading and tutoring, while other teachers turn to parents to relieve them of duties that otherwise would get in the way of teaching.

Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/parent.html

❖ Contact parents early before a problem occurs, particularly when there's good news to report.

Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers . (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/survguide.pdf

❖ Address parents' concerns head on. If you are taking a pedagogical approach that raises questions, work to show parents the benefits of your methods and explain your reasoning to them.

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